

Hammond could land £1.5m in green-belt housing deal

An undisclosed contract with a developer may earn the chancellor a windfall if planning permission is granted

Jon Ungoe-Thomas

The chancellor, Philip Hammond, who helped spearhead the government's housebuilding programme, could make more than £1.5m in a previously undisclosed deal over a possible housing development on green-belt land.

Land Registry documents reveal Hammond has agreed an option with a housebuilder on about three acres of land he owns next to his home in Surrey. The land could be worth more than £3m with planning permission: Hammond would be entitled to half of that amount.

Hammond, a multimillionaire, has not disclosed the option, agreed with the housebuilder Martin Grant Homes, on his parliamentary register or ministerial

register of interests. The chancellor insists the agreement – uncovered in an investigation by Channel 4's Dispatches programme that will be broadcast tomorrow – was a standard provision in some land purchases and did not need to be declared.

Hammond and the communities secretary, Sajid Javid, last year announced a £3bn housebuilding fund to help construct up to 200,000 homes. A report published last Monday by the Campaign to Protect Rural England said 425,000 homes were planned for green-belt land.

In June 2008 Hammond and his wife, Susan, paid £100,000 for land adjoining their home owned by Martin Grant Homes, based near Dorking in Surrey.

Under an agreement lasting until 2028, the developer can apply for planning permission and, if successful, is entitled to buy back the land from the Hammonds at half the new market value.

The value of prime grazing land in Surrey would be between £10,000 and £20,000 an acre, but land with planning permission for prime developments could be worth more than £1m an acre.

“The chancellor, a millionaire, says the agreement is a standard provision and did not need to be declared

Sir Alistair Graham, a former chairman of the committee on standards in public life, said Hammond should have declared an option agreed with a housebuilder on green-belt land. “He should have declared it because even though the land is not zoned for housebuilding, there is the potential in the future he could make a substantial profit,” he said.

Noel Grant, chairman and chief executive of Martin Grant Homes, said: “The arrangement was a safeguard for the seller in the unlikely event planning permission for development was granted. I am not aware of any scheme to obtain a planning permission on the land sold.”

Hammond, who built his fortune from the property company Castlemead, said policy was to protect the green belt. He said the land was not earmarked for development in the local plan and did not need to be declared because it was part of his principal residence.

He said: “I am confident that there is no conflict of interest and there is no failure to comply with registration requirements.”

Additional reporting: Rhai Ssan @JonUngoeThomas

Dispatches: Secrets of Britain's New Homes is on Channel 4 tomorrow at 8pm

We can loosen the green belt without destroying the land, News Review, pages 24-5



Philip Hammond and his wife Susan

SAS ‘murderers’ ignored warning of wrong targets

INSIGHT

A former British Army officer has claimed the Special Air Service (SAS) killed innocent Afghan civilians during night raids on their homes after ignoring warnings they were targeting the wrong people.

Captain Mike Martin has told The Sunday Times how he expressed severe misgivings about the “flawed” intelligence used to justify the raids during top secret “board meetings” in which SAS targets were identified.

He said: “They [the SAS] would go in and kill members of a family based on faulty intelligence. The next morning there would be people going, ‘What was going on last night? You just murdered a whole family.’”

Martin says he was barred from attending special forces target meetings after a number of exchanges in which he pleaded for the SAS to stop killing people that he believed were innocent.

Last week there were calls for an independent inquiry into allegations of war crimes by the SAS. It followed disclosures by The Sunday Times that members of the elite regiment were alleged to have killed Afghan civilians then falsified mission reports to cover up their actions.

The claims have been at the centre of an inquiry called Operation Northmoor, which was set up three years ago by the Royal Military Police (RMP) and had been looking at dozens of cases of alleged unlawful killing by British special forces until late last year. Sources said the RMP's investigations into 52 killings were cut recently to just one case involving four deaths following pressure from the Ministry of Defence.

Yesterday Dan Jarvis, the Labour MP who served in Afghanistan, said of last week's revelations: “This raises serious questions . . . and the MoD must now explain why they terminated what appears to have been an important investigation.”

Martin, a 34-year-old Territorial Army captain and fluent Pashto speaker, was tasked with making contacts

Rogue SAS unit accused of executing civilians

How The Sunday Times broke the story last week

among civilians. It was during his second tour of Afghanistan in 2009 that the policy of disrupting the Taliban by raiding the homes of suspected insurgents at night was stepped up.

“The special forces night raids set our campaign back massively because they killed so many of the wrong people. They acted on very poor intelligence even when they knew it was poor,” Martin said. “Some of their missions were so tenuous they were targeting guys who poured tea for the Taliban commander 15 years ago.”

Last week the MoD said: “The RMP has found no evidence of criminal behaviour by the armed forces in Afghanistan to date.”

‘ARMY APOLOGY’ FOR KILLING OF FOUR AFGHANS

The British Army is said to have apologised to the family of four Afghan men who were shot dead by special forces soldiers during a night raid on their home in a village near Lashkar Gah in February 2011.

Two of the victims are alleged to have been handcuffed before being killed. A family member, who found his father slumped against a wall, and a local official told The Sunday Times they were visited by British officers who they claim admitted the men had been wrongly targeted. “They just kept saying they were very, very sorry,” the official said.

The Ministry of Defence declined to comment.

Jail looms for hate preacher

Dipesh Gadhra

One of Britain's most notorious hate preachers is facing prison for the first time after allegedly breaching anti-terrorism controls intended to curb his activities.

The man, who cannot be named for legal reasons, is linked to the ringleader of the London Bridge attack and the family of another terrorist who was jailed last week for plotting to blow up an Elton John concert.

The 39-year-old suspect, identified by the initials LG, faces a sentence of up to five years if found guilty of breaching his terrorism

prevention and investigation measure. Such measures are used to stop extremists radicalising others when it has proved difficult to bring them to trial.

The decision to prosecute LG on a technicality has been made public in a High Court judgment by Mr Justice Nicol. It accuses LG of being a “senior leader” of the banned al-Muhajiroun group.

The group was once led by Anjem Choudary, a preacher and lawyer who stayed more or less within the law for 20 years until he was jailed last year for drumming up support for Isis.

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